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JEWISH POLICEMEN IN THE KOVNO GHETTO: LINKED BY AN INSTITUTION, RECOGNIZED BY THEIR ACTS

Introduction

In oral testimony, survivor Judith Meisel, who, as a 12 year old, was imprisoned with her family in the Kovno ghetto on August 15, 1941, describes Jewish policemen as loathsome and vicious. When they rounded up Jews for forced labor or to fill German quotas during actions and deportations, “[...] they didn’t give up their families. They gave strangers...they gave people they didn’t know.”¹ Meisel’s remembers that her name appeared on a list to take her from the ghetto, but by mistake a child of a Jewish policeman was taken in her place. When the policeman realized the error, he beat her up. She explained, “We feared them very much, the Jewish police.”² Harry Gordon, another survivor, described the police, “We suffered from the blows and kicks of the police and being dragged out of our homes into one working brigade or another, not knowing if we would return.”³

¹ J. Meisel, Interview code: 5916, segment 129, 1995, “USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive Online”, vha.usc.edu/testimony/5916?from=search [access: 21.07.2025].

² J. Meisel, Interview code 5916, segment 38.

³ H. Gordon, *Shadow of Death, The Holocaust in Lithuania*, Lexington, 1992, p. 74.

While Meisel's and Gordon's experiences provide eyewitness accounts of horrific actions of Jewish policemen, additional observations provide for a more complex analysis. After the Children's Action on March 27-28, 1944, during which over 1,300 children were taken by the Germans and those who assisted them, many ghetto residents were shocked to learn that some Jewish policemen had worked closely with the underground in a number of ways including hiding children.

On the morning of March 27, 1944, the 140 member Jewish police force was arrested and taken to the Ninth Fort for interrogation.⁴ SS-Oberscharführer, Bruno Kittel, demanded that they reveal the locations of hidden children, the plans of the underground, and documentation of the ghetto, for an informant had told the Gestapo that Jewish policemen worked with the resistance.⁵ Many in the leadership of the police had full knowledge of what Kittel demanded, but 39 of them withstood the savage beatings and were murdered, although, several policemen broke down and revealed locations of concealed children.⁶ However, a survivor, imprisoned too as a Jewish policeman, Yitzhak Kashiv, testified that ghetto inmates were stunned to learn that a number of Jewish policemen had not betrayed the ghetto, "Word spread of the conduct of Moshe Levin, Ika Greenberg [Joshua Grinberg, L.S.], Yehuda Zupovitz, and their companions. Their names were spoken with admiration by the ghetto residents, who until that day had little love for the police, as they were unaware of its activities behind the scenes."⁷

The phrase "behind the scenes" identifies that some Jewish policemen covertly supported the underground while, overtly appearing as a "collaborative formation". Saulius Sužiedėlis identifies that the term "collaboration" describes an array of behaviors, "...ranging from politically motivated conditional cooperation to complete identification with the ideological goals of the occupier".⁸ He suggests that the use of the term "spectrum of resistance" might be more useful, which for this study, could provide a way to identifying acts of Jewish policemen. However, as a spectrum is a linear measure it is unable to include the complexity of the acts of policemen who

⁴ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground*, trans. J. Setbon, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 403-406.

⁵ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 403-405; Y. Arad, *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilnius in the Holocaust*, Jerusalem 1980, p. 368n23.

⁶ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 403, 403n6, 404-406.

⁷ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 406, 449-454; quote from testimony of Yitzhak Kashiv (Kapchovsky), YVSA, 15 (recording 4); *Destruction of Jewish Kovno (Kaunas, Lithuania)*, ed. J. Gar, trans. E. Zilber, Munich 1948, p. 306, www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/kaunas2/kau277.html#Page301 [access: 26.08.2025].

⁸ S. Sužiedėlis, *Lithuanian Collaboration during the Second World War: Past Realities, Present Perceptions*, yivo.org/cimages/suziedelis_collaborators.pdf [access: 12.09.2025].

complied with German orders as a means to gain German trust to allow resistance. Therefore, the concept of a spectrum must be replaced with one of feasibility which necessarily includes changing circumstances in the midst of ongoing German violence.

In contrast, those whom the Germans identified as *litauischen Partisanen* (Lithuanian partisans), can be distinguished as collaborators on a “spectrum of collaboration”, per Sužiedėlis’ definition of “complete identification with the ideological goals of the occupier”. Sharing the German purpose to remove all Jews from Lithuania, they participated in the execution of Jews both independently and under the authority of Germans.⁹ Prior to the German invasion, the *Lietuvių aktyvistų frontas* (Lithuanian Activists Front: LAF), a nationalist organization, with members working with Nazi ideologues in Berlin, smuggled anti-Jewish leaflets during the year 1941 of the Soviet occupation through LAF networks throughout Lithuania. The LAF’s position on Jewish life in Lithuania was unequivocal, as one pamphlet circulated in March 1941, stated, “We must create an atmosphere that is so stifling for the Jews that not a single Jew will think that he will have even the most minimal rights or possibility of life in the new Lithuania”.¹⁰

Within weeks of the German occupation, regional Lithuanian police chiefs were complying and responding to Circular 3, marked, “Top Secret” and dated August 16, 1941, issued by the director of the Lithuanian Security Police, Vytautas Reivytiš, in Kaunas.¹¹ The circular demanded that regional police departments roundup and place Jewish men from the age of 15 and up near major roads and then report their number and locations. The response from Šakių County, dated September 16, 1941, stated that the local partisans and police had taken care of the situation and there were no Jews in the area.¹²

In contrast, when Jewish policemen carried out German demands for forced labor, selections, and deportations, they did not share the German’s purpose to erase Jews

⁹ Institute für Zeitgeschichte Archiv: IfZArch, Gy 36, vol. 1, MA 441, spool 4, pp. 3864-3895: Ermittlungsfahren gegen Karl Jäger (Preliminary investigation against Karl Jäger); *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, eds Y. Arad, S. Krakowski, S. Spector, New York 1989, pp. 1, 6-7, 11, 15, 18, 82: the pages refer to Operational Situation Report USSR: No. 8, No. 12, No. 14, No. 19, No. 48.

¹⁰ M. Needleman, *Lithuania Under the Soviet Occupation, 1940-41: Observations and Operations by the United States*, “MCU Journal” 2018, vol. 9, No. 2, p. 74n47: Needleman identifies location of original pamphlet.

¹¹ Circular 3: Concentrate Jews by roads for transport to camps: Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas (going forward referred to as: LCVA), R-693, ap.2, b.2, 1.

¹² Report from Šakių County that Jews had been removed prior to receiving Circular 3: LCVA, R-683, ap.2, b.2, 86.

from Lithuania. Instead, they conveyed the appearance, through actions of compliance with German directives, to have the “cover” to help Jews survive.¹³

To understand the concept of help-through-compliance, this study examines the lives of three ghetto policemen, Yehuda Zupovitz, Joshua Grinberg, and Mikhal Hofmekler. However, as this study includes a very small sample, it cannot provide general findings about the Jewish police force in the Kovno ghetto or across ghettos. Instead, the hope is to prompt nuanced inquirers into behaviors of individual Jewish policemen.

To examine the lives of Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler, one source referenced in this article is the manuscript, *Geschichte fuhr der viliampoler yiddisher geto-politsei* (*History of the Viliampole Jewish Ghetto Police*: referred to going forward as the *Manuscript*) written anonymously by at least three Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen, during 1942-1943.¹⁴ The value of referencing the *Manuscript* has been questioned, for would not the authors, as policemen themselves, present Jewish policemen subjectively? Foreseeing this accusation, the authors argue that they were writing for future historians who would not accept their work at face value:

The creators of this history are themselves policemen; they will of necessity look, so to speak, through policemen’s glasses. They will try, however, with all their might to preserve objectivity...the future historian will find here sufficient verified material of the history of the Kovno Jews... and this is the most important objective of the lines that follow.¹⁵

The above quote reveals two important points: first, that the authors believed that Nazi Germany would be defeated and held accountable for its crimes, and second, that they believed that other sources would support their claims.

However, can the material in the *Manuscript* be trusted? Throughout the *Manuscript*, the authors include both positive as well as negative descriptions of the

¹³ *Destruction of Jewish Kovno...*, p. 305: Jewish policemen work with underground; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 58, 75, 86, 124-125; *Smuggled in Potato Sacks*, eds S. Abramovich, Y. Zilberg, London-Portland 2011, pp. 273, 377; S. Ginaite-Rubinson, *Resistance and Survival*, trans. K. Gruodyte, D. Ross, Oakville 2015, pp. 62-64, 100.

¹⁴ *The Clandestine History of the Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police*, ed. S. Schalkowsky trans. S. Schalkowsky, Bloomington 2014, pp. ix, xii.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

actions of Jewish policemen. In the following, they list reasons as to why Jewish policemen were feared and hated: “[...] [Jewish policemen’s, L.S.] many instances of lack of tact and understanding by some of the policemen, the brutal approach, the self-importance and conceit, pride, and arrogance, the mechanical implementation of orders [...] all of this led to the population fearing the police and obeying it. But in their hearts they were hated [...]”¹⁶ The authors provide detailed descriptions of the brutal and unfair treatment of ghetto inhabitants by Jewish policemen, while also describing those who acted in the interests of the ghetto population.¹⁷

While the authors of the *Manuscript* remain unknown, they reference acts of Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler, none of whom volunteered to enlist in the police force. Zupovitz and Grinberg were mobilized by Zvi Levin, a leader in the underground and an unofficial member of the Kovno ghetto’s *Ältestenrat* (referred to going forward as the Elder Council), because of their Lithuanian military training to work with the resistance, while Hofmekler was placed in the force to protect his life as a musician.¹⁸ As ghetto policemen, the actions of the three are identified in oral histories, *Yizkor* (memorial) books, diaries, and memoirs.

However, the ability of the three men to work “behind the scenes” was enabled by the uniquely consistent support of the Elder Council.¹⁹ In the middle of July 1941, per a German demand, Jews elected Dr. Elchanan Elkes as the head Jew and Leib Garfunkel as his deputy.²⁰ In August 1941, the following official and unofficial members were added: Yakov Goldberg, Rabbi Shmuel-Abba Snieg, Dr. Ephraim Rabinowitz, and Michael Kopelman, as head of the Jewish police force, with Z. Levin and Chaim Nakhman Shapiro as unofficial members.²¹ Stadts Kommissar SA Brigadeführer Hans Cramer received and accepted a list of the official members, although Garfunkel had been identified as anti-German and “unreliable” in documentation circulated by German

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 206.

¹⁷ Ibidem, pp. 164,165, 206, 216.

¹⁸ *Jonava on the Banks of the Vylia: In Memory of the Destroyed Jewish Community of Jonava (Jonava Lithuania)*, ed. S. Noy, trans. coord. S. Goldsmith, New York 2022, p. 486; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 57; *Smuggled in Potato Sacks...*, p. 315.

¹⁹ *Destruction of Jewish Kovno...*, pp. 286, 290, 297; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 58; *Elkhanan Elkes Letter*, trans. M. Dor, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, collections.ushmm.org/findingaids/1999.86_01_trl_en.pdf [access: 9.09.2025]; letter German crimes.

²⁰ A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, ed. M. Gilbert, trans. J. Michalowicz, London 1991, pp. 25-26.

²¹ *The Clandestine History...*, p. 19; List of Elder Council and heads of ghetto institutions (no date): LCVA, R-973, ap.2, b.5, 5.

officials.²² This seeming oversight allowed for Dr. Elkes, Garfunkel, and Goldberg to serve on the Elder Council from August 1941 to April 4, 1944, with all three consistent in their support of resistance.²³

The Elder Council's support of underground movements is believed to have started as early as August 4, 1941, when leaders of underground factions formed an alliance.²⁴ Z. Levin describes the strong link: "I was the communication man between the leadership of the underground organization and the directors of the ghetto [Elder Council, L.S.], who secretly helped the partisan movement in the ghetto a great deal".²⁵ Z. Levin prompted the Council to place trusted Jews in leadership positions in the ghetto's institutions including in the Jewish police.²⁶

The authority of the Elder Council, to enable support of the resistance, relied upon the subordination and loyalty of the leadership of the Jewish police.²⁷ The authors of the *Manuscript* cite the underground police oath-taking ceremony, on November 1, 1942, as a platform in which both subordination and loyalty were declared. One of the four pledges of the oath was that each officer would carry out the Council's orders "[...] conscientiously and unconditionally [...]"²⁸ The authors of the *Manuscript* present the ceremony as exhibiting resistance to German authority and allegiance to the Elder Council.²⁹

Kopelman's dual positions, as the chief of the police and an official member of the Elder Council, reflected the alignment of the Council and the police force.³⁰ He was selected for the roles because he had been the director of the largest insurance company in Lithuania, *Lietuvos Lloydas*, where he had worked successfully with Germans and Lithuanians.³¹ However, as Kopelman had no military training, his deputy police chief, Michael Bramson, a former captain in the Lithuanian army and a key member in the

²² German identification of anti-German Jews: LCVA, R-1399, ap.1, b.15, 14,14ap,15; S. Sužiedėlis, *Crisis, War and the Holocaust in Lithuania*, Newton 2025, p. 342.

²³ D. Porat, *The Jewish Councils of the Main Ghettos in Lithuania: A Comparison*, "Modern Judaism" 1993, vol. 13, No. 2, p. 151; A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, pp. 31n1, 122, 123; D. Levi, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 412.

²⁴ A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, pp. 28, 28n4; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 64-66; *Destruction of Jewish Kovno...*, p. 286.

²⁵ *Jonava on the Banks...*, p. 486; D. Levi, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 86; I. Trunk, *Judenrat*, Lincoln 1996, p. 467.

²⁶ *Jonava on the Banks...*, p. 485; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 65.

²⁷ I. Trunk, *Judenrat...*, p. 487.

²⁸ *The Clandestine History...*, p. 358

²⁹ *The Clandestine History ...*, pp. 358, 360; D. Levin, *How the Jewish Police in the Kovno Ghetto Saw Itself*, trans. R. Morris, C Friedman, "Yad Vashem Studies" 2001, vol. 29, p. 197.

³⁰ A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, pp. 27-28, 31n1.

³¹ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 19, 71, 78.

resistance, organized the Jewish police force in the ghetto.³² Initially, twenty-six men submitted applications, but only ten were accepted.³³ To build a force, the Elder Council gave Kopelman the power to mobilize men.³⁴ The chart below (table 1) provides a sample of the numbers of policemen serving from 1941 to 1944.

Table 1

Kovno Jewish Ghetto Police Force: August 15, 1941 to March 27, 1944

Date:	Number of Policemen ³⁵ :
August 15, 1941	60
August 23, 1941	116
October 1941	220
December 1941/January 1, 1942	208
March 22, 1942	230
October 28, 1942	147
January 7, 1943	183
July 8, 1943	227
September 21, 1943	210
March 27, 1944	140: police force disbanded

Source: own research

An urgent task of Jewish policemen, for which they were despised and feared, was their fulfillment of German forced labor quotas. The Elder Council was adamant in fulfillment as forced labor was the only means to prolong the collective survival of the ghetto.³⁶ When the quota for workers at the Aleksotas airfield was not met in September 1942, the Elder Council issued the following statement: “You must understand the terrible danger that threatens us and our children and do everything to prevent such a terrible

³² *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 19-20, 79; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 57-58.

³³ *The Clandestine History...*, p. 78: the names of the accepted and rejected men have not been identified.

³⁴ Elder Council approves mobilization of men into Jewish Police Force: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (abbreviation USHMM will be used going forward), R-973, ap.2, b.12, 33; *The Clandestine History...*, p. 80.

³⁵ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 20, 218, 221; List of Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen: USHMM, R-973, ap.2, b.12, 33; List of Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen: USHMM R-973, ap.2, b. 84, 18-21; List of Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen: USHMM R-973, ap.2, b. 85, 5-8, 10-11ap, 12-15, 25-27; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 405.

³⁶ D. Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews in Lithuania*, trans. A. Teller, Jerusalem 2000, p. 224: facsimile of Karl Jäger December 1, 1941 Report: Jäger states Jews remaining in Kauen are 15,000 work-Jews and their families; *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, ed. W. Laqueur, Princeton 2001, p. 375; D. Porat, *Jewish Councils...*, pp. 152-153.

misfortune... Fulfill your labor duty completely [...]"³⁷ While the Labor Office organized assignments for forced laborers, the Elder Council ordered the Jewish police force to enforce compliance.³⁸

The largest forced labor site was the Aleksotas airfield, where in the spring of 1942, as many as 3,500 Jews were assigned. Survivor Dov Levin provides a description, "This workplace was both the largest and most difficult of all. Thousands of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war worked there from early in the morning to late at night, exposed to the elements, in all sorts of weather. They were beaten and treated with sadistic ruthlessness [...] the workers had to walk four hours to and from this work site."³⁹ D. Levin was smuggled out of the ghetto to fight with Jewish partisans in the forests, as supported by the Elder Council and Jewish policemen.⁴⁰

Through compliance with German directives, such as ensuring fulfillment of forced labor quotas, some Jewish policemen had agency to work "behind the scenes" to engage in resistance. The purpose of this article is to identify how Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler acted to navigate feasibility between compliance and resistance.

Literature Review

In the literature, a number of studies focus on the institutional and organizational aspects of Jewish police forces without providing inquiry into the individual lives of Jewish ghetto policemen. These include the robust scholarship of Katarzyna Person, Arūnas Bubnys, Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak, and Aharon Weiss.⁴¹ Other studies, such as those by Isaiah Trunk, Dalia Ofer, and D. Levin, provide more detailed analysis of Jewish ghetto police forces that include data of the social background of unidentified policemen, inquiry into the oath-taking ceremony of the Kovno ghetto police, and analysis as to why the authors wrote the *Manuscript*, respectively. However, their

³⁷ Elder Council order: airport workers to work to protect ghetto population: September 6, 1942: LCVA, 1390, ap.3, b.15, 3.

³⁸ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 82, 97, 161, 163, 169.

³⁹ *Hidden History of the Kovno Ghetto*, ed. D. Klein, Washington D.C. 1999, p. 224.

⁴⁰ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. xxi, xxviii, xxix.

⁴¹ K. Person, *Warsaw Ghetto Police*, trans. Zygmunt Nowak-Solinski, Ithaca-London 2021; A. Bubnys, *Kaunas Ghetto 1941–1944*, Vilnius 2014; A. Bubnys, *The Kaunas and Vilnius Jewish Ghetto Police (1941-1944)*, [in:] *The Holocaust in Lithuania: 1941-1944*, Vilnius 2020; B. Engelking, J. Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to a Perished City*, New Haven 2009; A. Weiss, *The Relationships between the Judenrat and the Jewish Police*, [in:] *The Nazi Holocaust Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jewry 6. The Victims of the Holocaust*, vol. 1, ed. M. Marrus, Westport-London 1989.

intent, too, was not to provide analysis of the beliefs and acts of individual ghetto policemen, thus exposing an understudied area in the literature.⁴²

Methodology

To address in the historiography the dearth of research of individuals who were Jewish ghetto policemen, this article will test the methodology of the collective biography. Although, as mentioned previously, the sample of three subjects, Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler, is small, this study is part of a larger one of 20 Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen. Collective biography, as conducted in the scholarship of Krista Cowman⁴³ and Sandra Holton,⁴⁴ has shown that the methodology identifies information about individuals which was previously obscured when emphasis by historians has been on collective groups linked by ideologies and/or organizations.⁴⁵ Cowman argues that by retaining a focus on individuals in relationship to the social institution that linked them, one can identify previously hidden elements.⁴⁶ This point is pertinent to the study of Jewish ghetto police men, as little research has been focused on individuals while, instead, an emphasis has been placed on the institution of the police force to which they belonged. Holton explains that the methodology is, “a project of recovery – of reconstructing stories that have become largely hidden in the patterns formed by previous history-making”.⁴⁷

Collective biography identifies the police force as what linked the lives of Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler, but not as a defining element. Instead, with the establishment of the link, the three men are studied as individuals to identify their acts as ghetto policemen which include influences identified in their pre-war lives.

Background

Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler built their lives in pre-war Kaunas, as the Lithuanian government systematically edged out Jews from the civil service,

⁴² I. Trunk, *Judenrat...*; D. Ofer, *Swearing-in Ceremony: The Police of the Kovno Ghetto, November 1, 1942*, “Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas” 2009, vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 229-241; D. Levin, *How the Jewish Police...*

⁴³ K. Cowman, *Collective Biography*, [in:] *Research Methods for History*, eds. S. Gunn, L. Faire, Edinburgh 2016.

⁴⁴ S. Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement*, London-New York 2003.

⁴⁵ K. Cowman, *Collective Biography...*, p. 85.

⁴⁶ K. Cowman, *Collective Biography...*, pp. 87, 92, 93, 96.

⁴⁷ S. Holton, *Suffrage Days...*, p. 2.

commerce, and higher education, particularly from 1926 to 1940.⁴⁸ In 1936, the single Jewish member of the Kaunas City Council stated that of the 800 municipal employees, less than 10 were Jewish.⁴⁹ Moreover, the government implemented price controls and licensing procedures that strategically favored Lithuanians.⁵⁰ The Lithuanization of the nation escalated with the increased call for “Lithuania for Lithuanians”, as embraced by the business organization, *Lietuvių prekybininkų, pramonininkų ir amatininkų sąjunga* (Lithuanian Union of Traders, Industrialists and Craftsmen).⁵¹ Educational opportunities for Jews were curtailed as well through a written entrance exam in Lithuanian and a health exam for applicants to medical school which contributed to a decrease of 15.6% in enrollment of Jews at *Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas* (Vytautas the Great University: VDU will be used going forward) from 368 (31.5%) of 1,168 students in 1922, to 591 (15.9%) of 3,709 students in 1934.⁵² Against this background of rising antisemitism, Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler studied, gained careers, and participated in social organizations, until their imprisonment in the ghetto.

Yehuda Zupovitz (1914-1944): Pre-war Life, Kaunas

Zupovitz was born in Jonava in 1914, the youngest of five children.⁵³ The family was forced to evacuate to the interior of Russia during World War I, as Jews were considered traitors to Imperial Russia.⁵⁴ The family returned in 1919 to Jonava, where Zupovitz attended the Zionist Tarbut Hebrew School and then the Jonava secondary 4-grade school from which he graduated in 1931.⁵⁵

To continue his education, Zupovitz moved to Kaunas and enrolled in the Lithuanian *Aukštesnioji Technikos mokykla* (Higher Technical school) to pursue a career in engineering.⁵⁶ After graduation in 1937, he was conscripted into the Lithuanian

⁴⁸ *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities. Lithuania*, ed. D. Levin, trans. S. Joffe, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 49-54.

⁴⁹ J. Lestchinsky, *The Economic Struggle of the Jews in Independent Lithuania*, “Jewish Social Studies” 1946, vol. 8, No. 4, p. 271; *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities...*, pp. 49-61; M. Niv, “Kaunas” – *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Lithuania*, trans. S. Yannai, Jerusalem 1996, p. 512: Jews comprised 36% (38,000) of the population of Kaunas in 1934.

⁵⁰ *The Republic of Lithuania, 1918-1939*, “CIA (.gov)” 2008, p. 103, www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP80T00246A002800010009-1.pdf [access: 10.05.2025].

⁵¹ J. Lestchinsky, *The Economic Struggle...*, pp. 272-272; *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities...*, pp. 49-61.

⁵² J. Lestchinsky, *The Economic Struggle...*, pp. 285, 287; *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities...*, pp. 49-61.

⁵³ Kaunio regionis valstybės archyvas (abbreviation KRVA used going forward): R-292, ap.5, b.4: Lithuanian Taxpayers and Voters.

⁵⁴ Y. Zupovitz CV 1938: LCVA, F-631, ap.7, b.15768, 6; D. Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History...*, pp. 107-108.

⁵⁵ Y. Zupovitz CV 1938: LCVA, F-631, ap.7, b.15768, 6.

⁵⁶ Y. Zupovitz education: LCVA, F-631, ap.7, b.15768, 2,3.

military and placed in the 1st Engineering Battalion, from which he graduated in 1938 with the rank of Junior Lieutenant in the officers' engineering reserve, a rare achievement for a Jewish conscript.⁵⁷ In 1938, he enrolled in VDU in the Technical Faculty of Civil Engineering.⁵⁸

At VDU, Zupovitz joined, Beitar, a branch of Zionist Revisionism, which advocated for Jews to physically defend themselves.⁵⁹ During the 1930s, Jewish students at VDU suffered persecution from professors and students which included verbal abuse and physical assaults.⁶⁰ As Beitar advocated self-defence, the organization provided military training with many members armed with scout knives.⁶¹ During the Soviet occupation, Beitar operated underground.⁶² Up until the German invasion, Zupovitz worked as an engineer in the Construction Department at "*Pieno centras*," the national Lithuanian dairy association.⁶³

On February 3, 1941, Zupovitz married Yehudit (Dita) nee Katz and moved in with her family.⁶⁴ On June 22, 1941, Zupovitz and Dita escaped from Kaunas, as Lithuanian partisans, identified by their white arm bands, robbed and murdered Jews throughout the city.⁶⁵ When their path was cut off by the Germans in Jonava, Zupovitz and Dita returned to Kaunas.⁶⁶ Dita's mother and brother had prevented Lithuanian partisans from attacking them by hanging Zupovitz's Lithuanian officer's uniform in the doorway of their apartment and showing them a photograph of Zupovitz in his Lithuanian military uniform.⁶⁷

⁵⁷ Y. Zupovitz education: KRVA, F-110, ap.2, b. 21; Y. Zupovitz military: LCVA, F-930, ap.2ž, b.105; Y. Zupovitz Jewish police file: USHMM, R-973, ap.2, b.87, 57ap; Y. Zupovitz military: LCVA, F. 402, ap.7, b.3096; Y. Zupovitz military: LCVA, F-930, ap.2ž, b.105; Z. Katz, *Von den Ufern der Memel ins Ungewisse*, Zürich 2002, p. 54.

⁵⁸ Y. Zupovitz education: LCVA, F-631, ap.7, b.15768, 7, 8ap.

⁵⁹ D. Zupowitz-Sperling, e-mail to author, March 4, 2023.

⁶⁰ J. Rosin, *My Journey to Freedom: Kybartai to Haifa*, New York 2014, pp. 68-69; W. Mishell, *Kaddish for Kovno*, Chicago 1988, pp. 6-7.

⁶¹ E. Bendikaite, *The Zionist Movement in Lithuania Between the Two World Wars: From Left to Right?*, [in:] *Selected Essays in Jewish Studies 2: History of the Jewish People and Contemporary Jewish Society*, 2005, p. 195; D. Wdowinski, *We Are Not Saved*, New York 1963, p. 17; D. Levin, *The Litvaks: A Short History...*, p. 164.

⁶² D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 86.

⁶³ Unpublished document written by Count Zubov in 1999, trans. E. Pakalnytė, personal archive of grandson, D. Palukaitis (2025).

⁶⁴ D. Zupowitz-Sperling, e-mails to author, October 3, 2022, January 18, 2023.

⁶⁵ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 66-67.

⁶⁶ Z. Katz, *Von den Ufern...*, pp. 59, 62.

⁶⁷ D. Shperling, *Germans Did Not Distinguish Lithuanians from Jews*, "Litvakes, Jewish (Litvak) Community of Lithuania", July 12, 2015, www.lzb.lt/en/2015/07/12/dita-shperling/ [access: 2.05.2023]; Z. Katz, *Von den Ufern...*, p. 61.

Yehuda Zupovitz: Jewish Ghetto Policeman

In the Kovno ghetto, Zupovitz and Dita moved into an apartment with her family.⁶⁸ Within days, Z. Levin, the go-between the underground and the Elder Council, as mentioned previously, recruited Zupovitz to join the police force to work with the resistance.⁶⁹ In the force, Zupovitz's positions included Chief of Precinct III, Deputy Chief of Police, and Police Inspector.⁷⁰ His final assignment was as a chief deputy.⁷¹

Ghetto survivors describe Zupovitz as publicly complying with German directives, while supporting resistance and ghetto inhabitants. Survivor Meir Tsoref (Goldshmidt) explains that when Zupovitz registered him and his wife in the ghetto, Zupovitz erased their affiliations with the communist underground, "In order to prevent any disaster from occurring Yudka Zopovich registered us under different names – Leon and Sonia Genes. We were no longer communists, but rather construction workers..."⁷² Tsoref explains the reach of Zupovitz's work with the underground, "...[Zupovitz] greatly assisted the groups of activists to unite them all – Zionists, Communists, Bundists, and ordinary Jews into an underground organization with the aim to battling the enemy."⁷³

The authors of the *Manuscript*, as mentioned previously, identify Zupovitz as the organizer of the covert police oath-taking ceremony. They explain that one of his purposes was to generate Jewish unity and pride, as Zupovitz voiced police commands for the first time in Hebrew, and not in Lithuanian, the official language of the force.⁷⁴ Another purpose of the ceremony was for individual policemen to pledge their subordination to the Elder Council.⁷⁵

As a police officer, Zupovitz amassed a collection of evidence of the German's and their assistants' crimes. His wife, Dita, remembers, "It was important to Julius [Yehuda, L.S.] to record events so that the world would learn later who the murderers were. Police officers kept a secret diary, a daily ledger, in Yiddish with names and events..."⁷⁶ Survivor, Hirsch Neiburger, too, remembers Zupovitz's work, "Thanks to the ghetto police, and in particular to the police commander, Yehuda Zupovitz, a start

⁶⁸ Z. Katz, *Von den Ufern...*, p. 74.

⁶⁹ *Jonava on the Banks...*, p. 486.

⁷⁰ D. Shperling, *Germans Did Not Distinguish...*; Y. Zupovitz Jewish police file: USHMM, R-973, ap.2, b.87, 58.

⁷¹ Y. Zupovitz Jewish police file: USHMM, R-973, ap.2, b.87, 58; S. Schalkowsky, ed., *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 250, 372n3.

⁷² *Jonava on the Banks...*, p. 420.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 424.

⁷⁴ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 420, 358, 359.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 358-361.

⁷⁶ D. Shperling, *Germans Did Not Distinguish...*; *The Clandestine History...*, p. 55n58.

was made on collecting material about the history of the ghetto in Kovno.”⁷⁷ Additionally, Zupovitz protected the photography of George Kadish who took over 1000 photographs which Zupovitz hid before Kadish escaped from the ghetto, which survived its liquidation.⁷⁸

However, on February 20, 1943, Zupovitz filed a police report that his home had been robbed by a neighbor and several accomplices.⁷⁹ While the outcome of the report has not yet been identified, the robbery suggests that Zupovitz was not respected nor feared by the perpetrators. Did the accused believe that Zupovitz had wronged them in some capacity? The authors of the *Manuscript*, too, provide a counter perspective of Zupovitz, “He certainly had his shortcomings, being somewhat too young, too hot headed and hasty in decision making; he did not have the influence that he could have had, had he been more solid and deliberate”.⁸⁰

During what D. Levin described as the period of “upheavals and liquidation”, from fall 1943 to July 1944, when the SS turned the ghetto into a concentration camp, underground movements merged into a formal alliance of Zionists and communists.⁸¹ Zupovitz was instrumental in providing military training, as Chaim Yellin, the leader of the communists, had no military experience.⁸² It was during this period that the Children’s Action and the destruction of the Jewish ghetto police force took place from March 27 to March 29, 1944. On the first day of the Children’s Action, as mentioned previously, the Germans ordered the arrest of the Jewish police force.⁸³ After removing the musicians, the remaining men were sent to the Ninth Fort to face torture while children in the ghetto were rounded up and taken away.⁸⁴

During his interrogations, Zupovitz withstood beatings that fractured his skull, slashed his ears, and gouged out an eye.⁸⁵ During his final return to his cell before he was murdered, Zupovitz is said to have told the other policemen to accept death rather than betray the ghetto.⁸⁶ As many as 39 Jewish policemen were tortured and murdered

⁷⁷ D. Levin, *How the Jewish Police...*, p. 191n21.

⁷⁸ *George Kadish*, [in:] *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Museum, encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/george-kadish [access: 16.08.2025]; *Hidden History of the Kovno...*, p. 55.

⁷⁹ Y. Zupovitz filed police report of robbery of his home: LCVA, R-973, ap.1, b.747, 1, 1ap.

⁸⁰ *The Clandestine History...*, p. 216.

⁸¹ D. Levin, *How the Jewish Police...*, pp. 186-187.

⁸² A. Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania 1941-1945*, Jerusalem 1996, p. 162.

⁸³ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 402.

⁸⁴ *The Clandestine History...*, p. 1.

⁸⁵ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 402, 403, 403n6, 404, 405; *Smuggled in Potato Sacks...*, p. 81; D. Shperling, *Germans Did Not Distinguish...*; *The Clandestine History...*, p. 2.

⁸⁶ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 403n6.

during the Children's Action which captured over 1800 children and the elderly: 1300 from in the Kovno ghetto (turned concentration camp) and 500 from surrounding satellite camps.⁸⁷

Joshua (Ika) Grinberg (1917-1944): Pre-war Life, Kaunas

Grinberg was born in 1917 in Rostov-on-Don, after his parents and sister were forced, as Jews, to evacuate to Russia.⁸⁸ The family returned to Kaunas in May 1921.⁸⁹ In 1937, Grinberg graduated from the Lithuanian *Kauno "Aušros" berniukų gimnaziją su komercinėmis klasėmis* (Kaunas "Dawn" boys' gymnasium with commercial classes), to then enroll in VDU in the Faculty of Engineering, but his studies were interrupted when he was conscripted into the Lithuanian military in 1938.⁹⁰ He completed his military service in January 1940, but was not granted the rank of an officer due to unclarified political issues.⁹¹ His petition to re-enroll in VDU was accepted on October 15, 1940, and on November 30, 1940, he was appointed as a junior teacher at the *Kauno XII vidurinė mokykla* (Kaunas 12 Secondary School), a Soviet national Yiddish school.⁹²

During the Soviet occupation, Grinberg was a leader in the underground Zionist organization, *Irgun Brith Zion*, which was created to counter Soviet suppression of Jewish life, as it promoted Jewish culture and identify, the Hebrew language, and Zionism.⁹³ Members met clandestinely, as they produced the movement's newspaper, *Nitzotz (Spark)* which included articles by Grinberg.⁹⁴ Members also rescued banned Hebrew books from their school libraries. Grinberg did not marry.

Joshua (Ika) Grinberg: Jewish Ghetto Policeman

⁸⁷ *Destruction of the Jewish Kovno...*, p. 213; Y. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, Jerusalem 2009, p. 320.

⁸⁸ D. Levin, *The Litvaks; A Short History...*, pp. 106-108.

⁸⁹ J. Grinberg Questionnaire Exile Return: LCVA, F-402, ap.10, b.9, 162, (no. 3838).

⁹⁰ J. Grinberg education: LCVA, F-631, ap.7, b.15057, 3,4.

⁹¹ *Lietuvos Kariuomenės Karininkai, III tomas, 1918-1953*, eds D. Gudienė, D. Žalienė, Vilnius 2003, p. 223.

⁹² J. Grinberg education: LCVA, F-631, ap.7, b.15057, 3; J. Grinberg teaching assignment: LCVA, F-391, ap.10, b.4521, 1-2; J. Grinberg physical education teaching request: LCVA, R-762, ap.4, b.64, 23.

⁹³ *Nitzotz: The Spark of Resistance in Kovno Ghetto & Dachau-Kaufering Concentration Camp*, ed. L. Weinrib, trans. E. Weinrib, Syracuse 2009, pp. 5, 34, 35, 170n89; Z. Birger, *No Time for Patience. My Road from Kaunas to Jerusalem*, trans. Sagir International Translations, LTD, New York 1999, pp. 34-35.

⁹⁴ Z. Birger, *No Time for Patience...*, pp. 34-35; *Nitzotz: The Spark of Resistance...*, pp. 5, 159.

In the ghetto, Grinberg served as a policeman and as an underground commander of *Irgun Brith Zion*.⁹⁵ He was mobilized by the initial deputy chief of police, Bramson, a member of the resistance.⁹⁶ Leib Sher, a survivor, explained Grinberg's dual roles, as he recalled an incident in which he had been assigned to wait for two resistance members outside of a safe house. When Grinberg and another ghetto policeman walked into the area, Sher's reaction was one of fear which soon changed to surprise when the policemen stated the required password.⁹⁷ Grinberg is also referenced as providing firearms, smuggling fighters through the ghetto gate, and protecting hideouts.⁹⁸ When the Germans issued the order that all books in the ghetto be relinquished, Grinberg, with members of *Irgun Brith Zion*, hid many which were later included in a clandestine library.⁹⁹

Grinberg is described as a fair and just policeman in his treatment of the ghetto population.¹⁰⁰ Ilya Gerber, as a teenager, described in a diary entry that he was initially angry when Grinberg arrested him for not working on a Sunday, as Grinberg had been his high school teacher.¹⁰¹ Gerber believed that his connection with Grinberg, known in the ghetto as "Vitamin P", the code name for the unfair system of privilege that developed in the ghetto, would help him avoid arrest, but Grinberg ignored his pleas and placed him in the ghetto jail.¹⁰² Gerber explains that he came to admire Grinberg, as he realized that if every Jewish policeman treated each ghetto inhabitant without granting privileged status, those with none would not have to suffer unfairly.¹⁰³

Grinberg held a number of positions in the police force which included Chief of Precinct IV, Chief of Precinct III, head of the ghetto prison, supervisor of the mobilization of forced labor brigades, and Chief of Precinct I.¹⁰⁴ He was described positively by the authors of the *Manuscript*, "He [Grinberg, L.S.] developed the jail statute, introduced discipline, arranged duty assignments, worked out the

⁹⁵ J. Grinberg Jewish police file: LCVA, R-973, ap.2, b.88, 34; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 75.

⁹⁶ *The Clandestine History...*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ A. Faitelson, *The Truth and Nothing But the Truth: Jewish Resistance in Lithuania*, trans. E. Broido, Jerusalem 2006, pp. 413-414; Faitelson quotes Sher.

⁹⁸ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, pp. 57-58, 75, 179, 239, 241; A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, pp. 249-250; Z. Birger, *No Time for Patience...*, p. 57.

⁹⁹ *Destruction of Jewish Kovno...*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁰ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 238, 314; A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, pp. 217, 221, 382.

¹⁰¹ A. Zapruder, ed., *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, Princeton 2014, p. 357.

¹⁰² *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 73, 170, 196.

¹⁰³ *Salvaged Pages...*, p. 357; *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 170, 196, 202.

¹⁰⁴ J. Grinberg Jewish police file: LCVA, R-973, ap.2, b.88, 34; List of Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen: USHMM, R-973, ap.2, b.84, 108.

documentation of prisoners and of the functionaries – he properly carried out the task entrusted to him”.¹⁰⁵

On March 27, 1944, Grinberg was taken to the Ninth Fort and tortured.¹⁰⁶ Upon his arrest, underground members retrieved two tin boxes from his home and buried them in the ghetto.¹⁰⁷ The boxes remained hidden for twenty years until their accidental unearthing in 1964 by a construction crew. Their contents remained largely unknown until 1998 when the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum obtained copies of the documents which included the *Manuscript* which was then translated from Yiddish into English in 2014 by Samuel Schalkowsky, a survivor of the Kovno ghetto.¹⁰⁸

Mikhal Hofmekler (1898-1965): Pre-war Life, Kaunas

Hofmekler, born in 1898 in Vilnius, was the eldest of five children in a family of musicians. From 1911 to 1915, he studied the violin in the School of the Imperial Music Society.¹⁰⁹ Not wanting to live under Polish occupation, the family moved to Kaunas in 1920. From 1921 to 1923, Hofmekler served in the Lithuanian military as a bandmaster.¹¹⁰ As a renowned conductor and violinist, he introduced Lithuanian pop music internationally through recording over 120 songs, from 1924 to 1940.¹¹¹ In 1932, President Antanas Smetona awarded Hofmekler the Fourth Class Order of the Grand Duke Gediminas for his musical accomplishments.¹¹² From 1920 to 1941, Hofmekler was a violinist in the State Theater Orchestra, and from 1940 to 1941, he conducted the Kaunas Radio Entertainment Music Ensemble.¹¹³

While no affiliation with a Zionist stream has been identified, from 1928 to 1940, Hofmekler was a member of the *Lietuvos Artistų Muzikų profesinė sąjunga* (Lithuanian Artists Musicians Professional Union), a trade union for musicians which provided employment mediation, as well as social welfare benefits, which included caring for

¹⁰⁵ *The Clandestine History...*, p. 238.

¹⁰⁶ A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, p. 524; *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 4, 55n58; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 403.

¹⁰⁷ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 4, 55n58.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. ix, x.

¹⁰⁹ R. Skudienė, *Moishe Hofmekler*, “Music Information Centre Lithuania”, www.mic.lt/en/database/oldies/composers-artists/hofmekleris/#bio [access: 22.02.2023].

¹¹⁰ M. Hofmekler military record: LVCA, F-593, ap.1, b.18, 352.

¹¹¹ A. Karaska, *Michelis (Moise) Hofmekleris*, [in:] *Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija*, Vilnius 2008, www.vle.lt/straipsnis/michelis-moise-hofmekleris/ [access: 25.05.2025].

¹¹² R. Skudienė, *Moishe Hofmekler...*

¹¹³ D. Petrauskaitė, *Music in the Kaunas Ghetto against the Background of Viliampolė (Slabodka) History*, „Lituanus” 2017, vol. 63, No. 1, p. 69; A. Karaska, *Michelis (Moise) Hofmekleris...*

orphans of deceased members.¹¹⁴ Hofmekler served as a board member several times. He was also a member of the Union of Jewish Soldiers who participated in the liberation of Lithuanian independence.¹¹⁵

Hofmekler married twice in Kaunas. On August 3, 1926, he wed Beile, nee Fridman, and they had one child in 1927.¹¹⁶ The couple divorced in January 1937, and then in March 1937, Hofmekler married Perle, nee Radziunski. They had one daughter, Dalia, in 1939.¹¹⁷

Mikhal Hofmekler: Jewish Ghetto Policeman

Hofmekler moved into the ghetto with his parents, wife, and daughter.¹¹⁸ Many believed that Jews would be safer in the ghetto which proved unfounded after the Germans carried out the Intellectuals Action on August 18, 1941. The Elder Council was told that the Germans required 500 well-educated men to work in the Kaunas city archives.¹¹⁹ Instead of going to the archives, 534 Jewish men were taken to the Fourth Fort and shot.¹²⁰ Dalia, Hofmekler's daughter, explains the connection between the Intellectuals Action and her father's placement in the police force, "After the round-up of intellectuals the Jewish Council...decided that it was best to employ musicians as policemen. As a result of that decision, my father not only conducted the orchestra in the ghetto, but was also a member of the Jewish police..."¹²¹

Hofmekler was assigned to a number of posts that included at the police store, on the commission that studied the social conditions of police officers, temporary posts as a second on the Elder Council, and head of the force's cultural art organization with his primary work as that of the conductor of the Police Orchestra.¹²²

In the summer of 1942, the Elder Council was given German permission to create a Police Orchestra to present public concerts.¹²³ The news was debated in the ghetto,

¹¹⁴ M. Hofmekler musicians' trade union file: LCVA, F-402, ap.5, b.94, 2-4,7,12,15.

¹¹⁵ M. Hofmekler member of Union of Jewish Soldiers: LCVA, 593, ap.1, b.2, 164.

¹¹⁶ M. Hofmekler's first child: LCVA, F-593, ap.1, b.18, 352.

¹¹⁷ *Smuggled in Potato Sacks...*, p. 315.

¹¹⁸ D. Hofmekler-Ginzberg, *Rescued Lithuanian Jewish Child Tells about Shoah*, rescuedchild.lt/content.php?id=16908 [access: 12.06.2024].

¹¹⁹ *Destruction of Jewish Kovno...*, pp. 54-56.

¹²⁰ D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 6.

¹²¹ *Smuggled in Potato Sacks...*, p. 315.

¹²² M. Hofmekler Jewish police file: USHMM, R-973, ap.2, b.87, 26.

¹²³ D. Petrauskaite, *Music in the Kaunas...*, pp. 70-71; *The Kovno Ghetto Orchestra: 1943-1944*, "Jewish Virtual Library" (2014), www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/Kovno_Orchestra.html [access: 1.03.2025].

as many felt that performances would be disrespectful in the midst of the ongoing murder and destruction of Jewish life.¹²⁴ When public concerts commenced, they were attended by German officials, which Moshe Diskant, a Hebrew teacher and poet, described, “The ghetto elite are invited into the decorated salon and with them they bring the men who ordered – our murder, degradation, and slaughter!”¹²⁵ Helen Holzman remembers the surreal interactions with German officials, “Every day facing death, the musicians of the Ghetto orchestra would give the most refined concerts. As in a grotesque theatre, the high German officials would attend them, being impressed, shaking hands with the musicians and giving promises of various privileges.”¹²⁶ However, Dalia explains that the Germans’ love of music saved her life. Her mother quickly hid her from Germans who, when they entered their home, noticed her father’s violin and her grandfather’s double bass and asked them to play, after which they left.¹²⁷ Hofmekler conducted as many as 80 concerts for ghetto inhabitants until the fall of 1943 when the ghetto became a concentration camp.¹²⁸

On November 1, 1942, the Police Orchestra performed at the underground police officers’ oath-taking ceremony. After the signing of the oath, Hofmekler conducted the orchestra in the national march, “Beshuv Adonai” (“When the Lord Brings Back”) from Psalm 126. The authors of the *Manuscript* describe the audience’s response, “With tears in our eyes the entire assembly sang along the words of the prophecy of freedom and liberation, of the fulfillment of our dreamed-of and most sacred hopes, which are today only fantasies but may perhaps become a reality tomorrow”.¹²⁹

On July 24, 1943, Hofmekler conducted another underground concert to commemorate Theodor Herzl, the creator of political Zionism, and the Hebrew poet, Haym Nahman Bialik.¹³⁰ Avraham Tory, a survivor, describes the response, “Inspired by a sense of the significance of a great moment, those gathered listened to the sounds of the orchestra... Our hearts were filled with joy; tears flowing from our eyes. Hope

¹²⁴ W. Mishell, *Kadish for Kovno...*, p. 132.

¹²⁵ *Hidden History of the Kovno...*, p. 176.

¹²⁶ *Dies Kind Soll Leben Die Aufzeichnungen der Helene Holzman 1941-1944*, eds R. Kaiser, M. Holzman, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 210, archive.org/details/dieskindsollebe0000c_zap/page/n9/mode/2up?view=theater&q=tod+ [access: 13.04.2025].

¹²⁷ *Smuggled in Potato Sacks...*, p. 316.

¹²⁸ D. Petrauskaite, *Music in the Kaunas ...*, pp. 75, 77; Kovno ghetto concert programs: LCVA, R-973, ap.2, b.231.

¹²⁹ *The Clandestine History...*, pp. 359-361.

¹³⁰ A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, pp. 432-433.

and courage issued from the depths of our souls, crying aloud: “Our hope is not yet lost!”¹³¹

Eight months later, on March 27, 1944, as the Jewish police force was arrested, Hofmekler was removed.¹³² SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Wilhelm Goecke, the head of the Gestapo in the ghetto, is believed to have ordered the release of Jewish musicians.¹³³ He is characterized as “strongly favoring” music, as during his tenure, starting in the fall of 1943, he organized performances of the Police Orchestra for high ranking German officials.¹³⁴

During the liquidation of the ghetto in July 1944, Hofmekler was deported to Stutthof and then to Dachau. After liberation, he and surviving musicians formed an orchestra, which on May 7, 1946, performed in the Nuremberg Opera House, “...to an audience of witnesses, prosecutors and judges of the International War Crimes Tribunal”.¹³⁵

Details of the Lives of Yehuda Zupovitz, Joshua Grinberg, and Mikhel Hofmekler

Through the archival research referenced in this article, in Lithuania, America, and Germany, the chart on the following page provides details of Zupovitz’s, Grinberg’s, and Hofmekler’s pre-war lives and their lives in the ghetto. Similarities are identified as all three came from families with sufficient economic means to provide them with educations which they pursued to professional levels. They each served in the Lithuanian military and belonged to social organizations, with Zupovitz and Grinberg identified as Zionists and Hofmekler as a member of a trade union. Each was a professional before the war: Zupovitz, an engineer, Grinberg, a teacher, and Hofmekler, a musician. While Zupovitz and Hofmekler married, Grinberg did not. As ghetto policemen, they each held leadership roles. All three were fluent in Lithuanian and German, the two languages of those who persecuted them. The major difference between the three is that Zupovitz and Grinberg actively prepared the resistance as

¹³¹ A. Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust...*, p. 433.

¹³² *The Clandestine History...*, p. 1; D. Levin, Z. Brown, *The Story of an Underground...*, p. 402.

¹³³ *Destruction of Jewish Kovno...*, p. 205.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 308-309.

¹³⁵ *Michelis (Moise) Hofmekleris*, “Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija”, Vilnius 2008, www.vle.lt/straipsnis/michelis-moise-hofmekleris/ [access: 10.07.2025]; A. Anderson, *Displaced Music: The Ex-Concentration Camp Orchestra in Postwar Germany*, “Journal of Musicological Research” 2015, vol. 34, p. 149.

they trained fighters, smuggled, supported hiding places, and amassed evidence, while Hofmekler provided resistance through his music (table 2).

Table 2

Details: the Lives of Yehuda Zupovitz, Joshua Grinberg, and Mikhel Hofmekler

	Yehuda Zupovitz	Joshua Grinberg	Mikhel Hofmekler
Father's career	manufacturing	Jeweler, property owner	musician
Religion: Jewish	Unknown affiliation	Unknown affiliation	Unknown affiliation
Education	university	university	conservatory
Military	Jr. Lieutenant: engineering	private	private: bandmaster
Career	engineer	teacher	musician
Associations	Beitar, Zionism	<i>Irgun Brith Zion</i> , Zionism	– musicians' trade union – union of Jewish soldiers
Marriage	wife: no children	not married	two marriages; two children
Kovno ghetto	Jewish policeman: mobilized; leadership positions	Jewish policeman: mobilized: leadership positions	Jewish policeman: placed in the force: leadership positions
Languages	– Lithuanian – Yiddish – Hebrew – Russian – German	– Lithuanian – Yiddish – Hebrew-German – English	– Lithuanian – Yiddish – Russian – German
Family	11 members	5 members	7 members
Resistance	– trained/aided resistance – supported hiding – collected evidence	– trained/aided resistance – supported hiding – collected evidence	– underground concerts of unity, pride, and hope
Fate	murdered by Gestapo	murdered by Gestapo	survived: died in Germany, 1965

Source: own research

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to expand inquiry into the lives of individual Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen to identify their acts. To clarify this purpose, a distinction was made that the acts of the Lithuanian partisans, identified as such by the Germans whom they assisted, shared the Germans' goal and purpose of erasing Jews from Lithuania. This distinction is in contrast to acts of Jewish policemen who complied with German demands as a means to save Jewish lives when they feasibly could.

The methodology of the collective biography uncovered previously unrecognized details of the lives of Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler in pre-war Kaunas and as Jewish policemen imprisoned in the ghetto. The three built their pre-war lives amid increasing antisemitism. They each pursued an education, served in the Lithuanian military, obtained employment, and participated in social networks. All three retained their professional jobs until the German invasion.

Zupovitz, Grinberg, and Hofmekler entered the ghetto with professional skills, career experience, and leadership competencies which appeared in their acts of resistance as ghetto policemen. Zupovitz and Grinberg utilized their military training to prepare, instruct, and smuggle underground fighters. Moreover, they supported and did not betray the hiding places of children in the ghetto, while they secretly amassed documentation of ghetto life. Hofmekler employed his musical skills to provide unity, pride, and hope. After betrayal of their resistance work, the Gestapo tortured and murdered Zupovitz and Grinberg, while Hofmekler was spared arrest because of his musical talent.

As the identification of the actions of the three men cannot establish findings that can be attributed to the Kovno ghetto police force as a whole, the hope is that inquiry into their individual lives will generate discussion within the historiography. This is to counter the limitation of findings of Jewish ghetto police forces as "collaborative formations", to instead prompt research of individual policemen to identify their actions in the ghettos through a concept of feasibility reflected in compliance with German orders to enable acts of resistance.

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Summary

Several Jewish policemen, fearing that future generations would not believe the horrors that engulfed them in the Kovno ghetto, anonymously wrote a history of the Jewish police force. Anticipating accusations of subjectivity – policemen writing about their own institution and colleagues - they swore to future historians to provide objective perspectives. What the authors could not know was that Jewish policemen would be judged as corrupt and brutal collaborators after the war, a perception that defines them monolithically as “collaborative formations”. As this perception has constricted consideration of Jewish policemen in the historiography, this article hopes to expand understanding through identification of acts of resistance. To this purpose, it examines the lives of three policemen, Yehuda Zupovitz, Joshua Grinberg, and Mikhal Hofmekler. Although the sample is too small to be considered as representative of Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen, it allows identification of their acts. As this inquiry is part of a larger study that will examine the lives of 20 Kovno ghetto Jewish policemen, it will test the methodology of collective biography to identify the acts of the three during the pre-war years and during their imprisonment in the ghetto.

Key words: Kovno Ghetto, Jewish Police, Resistance, Collective Biography